

ODE TO A CROSS-DRESSING DUMPSTER



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The dumpster keeps architecture alive. It's how a building breathes. When you see a dumpster you can guess that the neighborhood you are seeing it in is pretty healthy.

When you view a construction site as a structural maternity ward, you notice that the dumpster is always present as midwife. And at the other end of the cycle, at the demise of a building, at a destruction site, there is also always a dumpster present, administering the last rites to a building before it's levelled.

Now doctor, if the city is your patient. Imagine you're up in a helicopter, viewing your patient from an aerial perspective. New York City itself is laid out there on the operating table of Manhattan Island. The streets are the arteries. Vehicular traffic is the circulation. Buildings are the major organs, that produce the byproducts that it is the function of the dumpster to transport. We need to do a blood count. The dumpster represents the white blood cells that absorb the excess and transport and dispense with it. Taking a dumpster count is like taking a blood count, or taking the temperature of a neighborhood. It tips you off as to the biological well-being of a location. If you don't see a dumpster, you might assume the neighborhood has a fever. Or, on the other hand, you might assume that the dumpsters are hidden in the basements, repressed into the unconscious, as happens in the "better" neighborhoods. What might Freud say about the genuine well-being of such neighborhoods?

Now Doc, look again, let the city be your psychiatric patient now; New York City, the little neurotic, is laid out on your couch. The host building is the multi-levelled mind. The contents of the dumpster are the results of the psychoanalytic session, all those repressed urges, those Oedipal complexes and second childhoods, those dirty desires denied, those primal glimpses and screams, even the transference itself, it's all in there, in the dumpster. The dumpster itself is the site of transference. It's the psychological DNA of a building. It's the double helix unwound.

But the golden dumpster is something yet again. It's psychological space renewed or rendered whole, like the timelessness of the unconscious, like the potential space of infantile unity with the phallic mother, like the Lacanian realm of the imaginary. Like Judy Garland's Emerald City somewhere over the rainbow.



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24 HOUR 24 CARAT

From dawn to dusk on June 18, 1994, a large room-sized dumpster with a gilded golden interior was parked in front of the Storefront for Art and Architecture as my contribution to the show Queer Space. The cross-dressed dumpster is an homage to a variety of social transformations that conduce to individual freedom and genuine selfhood where before there was just social convention. These include transgender phenomena as well as reversals of class, education, and ideology. Society has treated many marginalized people as social debris, or thrust them into narrow crates of confinement. Still, through investigation of selfhood they make a delicate beauty in the midst of degradation, like the gilded interior of the lowly dumpster. The difference between the outside and the inside of the dumpster refers to "the reverse of the medal," or other side of the coin, as Oscar Wilde referred to transvestism in the novel Teleny.

Maura Sheehan



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THE CROSS-DRESSED DUMPSTER

The gilded interior of the dumpster is a queer space because it reverses polarities. It recklessly reconciles antitheses. It's a cross-dresser. It shows a situation that has pulled itself inside out. It's the double helix unwound. If the city is a verb, the dumpster conjugates it.

Maura Sheehan



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